critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Two on the Aisle-Mark Hellinger, 7/19/51. New musical revue presented by Arthur Lesser, starring Bert Lahr and Dolores Gray. Featured are Colette Marchand and Elliott Reid. Music by Jule Styne. Lyrics and sketches by Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Entire production directed by Abe Burrows, dance numbers staged by Valerie Bettis.

Hits Revisited

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/7/49. Four daily reviewers are almost convinced that the Rodgers and Hammerstein modern classic is the great American musical. Shanley, Times; Garland, Journal American, Watt, News, and Watts, Post, witnessed the 917th performance to review newcomers Roger Rico and Martha Wright in the leads. Though all noted the French basso's language difficulty as making certain parts incoherent, only Garland felt he let the show down. All praised Miss Stewart and the new Bloody Mary played by Diosa Costello. Mainstays of the cast Myron McCormick, William Tabbert, Harvey Stephens, Martin Wolfson, who have all played since opening night, are still perfect. The critics didn't compare Miss Wright and Mary Martin, but they did enjoy her performance. Watts expressed their views in stating that both seemed a bit colorless and unexciting in comparison with the originals. But they are quite satisfactory for those seeing it for the first time.

Guys and Dolls-46th St. Theatre, 11/24/51. Current performance of Martin & Feuer musical verson of Damon Runyon story is even better than opening night, commented Watts, Post. Everyone in the company seemed at the top of his form. The critic doubts if Robert Alda has received enough credit for his excellence. Somehow he feels that Vivian Blaine is the least indispensable member of a completely satisfying cast. It's sure to be a hit in London...The Happy Time, which closed this week, went on winning friends as the quiet hit, Sheaffer, Eagle, observed on revisiting it recently. Sticking to his original opinion, the critic still thought the Rodgers and Hammerstein production was an enjoyable, box office wise show, not a good play.

Strawhat Tryouts

Edward Mabley's Glad Tidings, starring Melvyn Douglas and Signe Hasso, started off summer circuit tour at Seacliff, LI, Summer Theatre. Francis, Billboard, and Stern, Show Business, tabbed the comedy as delightful summer theatre entertainment, but differed over its chances on Broadway. Former believes with necessary rewrites it will click, while latter is doubtful...The Fourposters, Jan de Hartog's drama starring Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn, began its summer tour at Westhampton, LI, Playhouse. Vern, Variety, suggests the team drop it as a Broadway hope after the summer. The two character play never seems more than a parlor charade...The Holly and the Ivy, Wynyard Browne's new drama presented by the Theatre Guild principals and starring Leo G. Carroll, Jack Manning and Anne Burr, was tried out at Westport, Conn, Playhouse. Doul, Variety, found it a fairly tedious little drama.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Every theatre fan and professional should read in its entirety a most important three part article by Dennis McDonald in Billboard entitled "ANTA Case History." The pros and cons of the slightly complicated set up, answers to major criticisms and constructive suggestions are included. Back issues of the June 20, July 7 and July 14 issues may be obtained at 25 cents each from Billboard, 2160 Patterson Street. Cinn. It is required reading for all future ANTA debates.

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' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. World Telegram & Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. Newark News
11. Women's Wear Daily
12. Wall Street Journal
13. Journal of Commerce
14. George Jean Nathan
15. Ward Morehouse
16. Morning Telegraph
17. Variety
18. Billboard
19. Theatre Arts
20. New Leader
21. Freeman
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr. Science Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro".

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50.	- Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29. - None: 16 - 21-23-28.
CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50.	- Con: 18-19-28-29. None: 16-21. So-So: 3.
COURTIN' TIME-6/7/51.	- Con: 1-4-10-18-23. So-So: 5-6. None: 14-15-19-20-21-22-25-29.
GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50.	- Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.
GRAMERCY GHOST-4/23/51.	- Con: 1-2-4-5-6-10-11-14-17-22-25-26-27-30. None: 13-15-16-19-20-21-23-24-28-29.
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50.	- Con: 28.
THE KING AND I-3/29/51.	- Con: 28. None: 19-21.
KISS ME KATE-12/31/48.	- Con: 29. None: 21-30.
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51.	- Con: 14-19. None: 21-25-28.
OKLAHOMA-5/29/51.	- None: 19-20-21-22-25-26-27-28-29-30.
THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51.	- Con: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27. So-So: 8. None: 12-20-22.
SEASON IN THE SUN-9/28/50.	- Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10. None: 7-13-15-16-21.
SEVENTEEN-6/22/51.	- Con: 2-4-7-26-27-30. None: 19-20-21-22-24-25-28-29.
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49.	- Con: 27. So-So: 23. None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.
STALAG 17-5/8/51.	- Con: 4-20-23-28-30. So-So: 3. None: 19-21.
A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51.	- Con: 2-7-14-18-20-25-27-28. None: 15-19-21.

' Book Notes '

Show business books on Prentice Hall's fall list include: Cobina Wright's "I Never Grew Up", David Ewen's "Complete Book of Twentieth Century Music", and a novel by David Niven entitled "Once Over Lightly."...Macmillan will publish "Henry Irving: The Actor and His World," by grandson Laurence Irving...Rinehart will publish a new edition of "Anthology of English Drama Before Shakespeare" edited by Robert R. Heilman and five Shakespeare plays in one volume which will include "King Lear," "Henry IV, Part I" "Hamlet," "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Tempest"...Paul Denis, former Compass columnist, finished his "Celebrity Cook Book" to be published by Rockport..."But Not Forgotten: The Adventures of the University Players" by Norris Houghton will be published by William Sloane Associates.

"The Man on the Coach," a novel by press agent James Proctor, billed as one of the funniest books of the year by Chapman, News, and Pollock, Compass. The book was discussed by NBC-TV Author Meets the Critics.

' Green Room Department '

TICKET SCRAMBLES...Frankly, there is no hope of ever solving the theatre ticket problem, explains Sylester, News. Human nature being what it is, most people want to go to hits. With 5,000 seeking 1,000 seats, someone is bound to make extra money. Development of "Expense Account Society" is prime factor in bidding for high price tickets.

COLUMN TIPS...Famed Polly Adler attended Season in the Sun, causing chuckles in cast, says Kilgallen...GBS Riviera estate to be converted into swank resort hotel, hears Walker...Interplayers banned from Carnegie Hall due to union dispute, reports Lyons.

MUSICAL TRENDS...Call Me Madam is sole musical on Broadway based on original script. Trend today, points out Burr, Playbill, is to base a musical on adaptation. Thus it starts with basic material that is accepted and loved by a large public. But originals, which have less competition, have more impact of novelty than they had in the old days.

EXPLAINING ANTA...The main endeavor of ANTA is to stimulate and encourage, reminds Hawkins, WT&S. Nothing the organization does is really an end in itself. It is an organization primarily of services rather than accomplishments. The bringing of foreign troupes here, though heavily criticized, works toward general aims of ANTA.

SHUT IN BOOKS...Call to readers to send theatre books to group of hospitalized veterans in California who are interested in the theatre made by Coleman, Mirror. He urged critics to send their current theatre books. Readers may send books to Richard Odren, Ward 14, Veterans Hospital, Willow Road, Palo Alto, California.

WINCHELL SAYS...Herald-Tribune drama post may go begging because those rumored set have turned it down...Closed circuit TV offering full length Broadway hits past blueprint stage.

AMATEUR PRODUCERS...Drama editors are turning producers this year. Sylvester, News, is an "angel" at Westhampton, LI, Playhouse, and Rice, Post, has picked a play to be produced at Putnam County, NY, Playhouse. His third annual choice of a worth while script is Hardwick Nevin's Infamous Angel. The script was submitted from Ray Yates' Dramatists Forum. It has been optioned many times, but never produced.

LIVE THEATRE...New York in 1951 remains what it was in 1901, the unchallenged theatrical capital of America, Morehouse, WT&S, is convinced after a cross country auto trip. Even in summer there are 12 to 15 current productions worth seeing. Try to say that of the London theatre in any month in any year and you are stretching it a bit.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Shows that closed include Make A Wish and The Happy Time...League of New York Theatres invites anybody in theatre to debate proposed ticket code suggestions... Shriners aided business of all shows...Profiles of Chicago critics Claudia Cassidy, Chicago Tribune, and Ashton Stevens, Chicago Herald American, featured in July Theatre Arts...Frank Farrell, McNaught columnist, promoted to major in U.S.Marine Corps Reserve...ANTA will prepare program for Berlin Arts Festival in September... UNESCO conference postponed until January...Producer Lester Cohen advertises in Variety that he will present $50 reward if you suggest actress to star in The Web and The Rock.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

EVE LE GALLIENNE...Civic Repertory Theatre founder is positive that this country will some day have a repertory theatre, she told WNBT Ben Grauer. It cannot go on being the only country in the world without one. Of course at first, to insure low prices, it will have to be subsidized. But the theatre can be helped the same way music and dance have been aided. She is now working on a sequel to her autobiography, which she wrote at age 33. The name of the new book is "Plus 20."

ROGER RICO...South Pacific's new lead is an easy man to interview, discovered Sheaffer, Eagle. In spite of his limited English, and the use of a translator, he is easier to interview than some American players. The Paris Grand Opera star is on a 15 months leave of absence. The critic, recalling that French audiences are passionately devoted to their favorites, wonders if there was any fuss when M. Rico left.

ALLAN MELVIN...Stalag 17 actor was signed for a straight role in the comedy-drama produced by Jose Ferrer, he explained to MBS Sardis. The producer added the impressions of famous actors during rehearsals as an added attraction to the part. The young actor, who is considering doubling in night clubs, had always aimed at breaking into the theatre through his mimicry work.

' Digests of Past Hits '

Sally, Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., musical which brought Marilynn Miller to Broadway in her first starring role opened at the New Amsterdam Theatre on December 21, 1920. The musical featured a book by Guy Bolton and lyrics by Clifford Grey, B.G.DeSilva and Ann Caldwell. Music was written by Jerome Kern, with Victor Herbert contributing music for the ballets. Co-starring in cast was Leon Errol, Walter Catlett, Irving Fisher and Mary Hay headed the supporting cast of the original. The latest Broadway revival was presented in 1948 by Hunt Stromberg and William Berney and starred Willie Howard and Bambi Lynn.

First nighters of 1920 jammed the theatre to see Miss Miller act, sing and dance in her first starring role after three successful years as top dancer in the Follies. Victor Herbert led the orchestra. They were all pleasantly surprised at the acting and singing talents of the star. Scenery by Joseph Urban was termed the most lavish and expensive ever seen in a musical. Supporting cast was roundly applauded. Kern's music, especially "Look for the Silver Lining" was welcomed. Minor criticism from most was that the book resembled the recent Irene too much. While several thought some of the lyrics by Grey were vulgar. But all was serene when the star was onstage. Alexander Woollcott, Times; Charles Darnton, Evening World; Alan Dale, American; Heywood Broun, Tribune; Burns Mantle, Mail; Louis V. De Foe, World; were among those praising her. Latter noted she needed a little more confidence in her own abilities. Variety critic was sorry there wasn't more of Miller dancing. He also predicted that musical team of Miller and Errol, if kept together, could surpass team of Donald Brian and Julia Sanderson.

' Legit Stuff '

John McClain, Journal American, invites readers to write his summer vacation columns...Shubert Alley signboards plugging St.Louis Municipal Opera...Courtin' Time and Penn Camera Store sponsoring photo contest for pictures showing "Summertime is courtin' time"...Morning Telegraph to feature reprints of famous articles from files by Ring Lardner, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur...ANTA plans eight play season with seats sold by subscription only...Thirty-six shows now running in London, and 39 in Paris...One hundred and ten dramas on option for new season plus 75 musicals.